

Cherokee DNA, Hebrew Genotypes, and the Claims of Joseph Smith¹

Recent claims (primarily from 2023–2025) suggesting that Cherokee DNA includes significant Hebrew or Middle Eastern genotypes have circulated in online forums, social media, and fringe publications, often tied to alternative historical theories or apologetic defenses of religious narratives like the Book of Mormon.

These claims largely stem from the work of Donald N. Yates, a genealogist and founder of DNA Consultants, Inc., who has self-published books and reports asserting that Cherokee DNA shows “high levels of test markers associated with the Berbers, native Egyptians, Turks, Lebanese, Hebrews, and Mesopotamians,” making them “more Jewish than the typical American Jew of European ancestry.” Yates’ studies, such as Cherokee DNA Studies II (2022, with updates in 2023–2025), analyzed samples from self-identified Cherokee descendants, claiming haplotypes (genetic markers) link them to Sephardic Jews, Phoenicians, or ancient Israelites.

These ideas have been amplified on platforms like YouTube. For example, a July 2025 video titled “America’s Darkest DNA Secret | The Cherokee People”) and users on X (formerly Twitter) about “lost tribes of Israel” connections, often without scientific context.

Are These Claims Correct?

No, these claims are not supported by mainstream scientific evidence and are widely regarded as controversial, methodologically flawed, and overstated by geneticists and anthropologists. Here’s why:

Lack of Peer Review and Small Sample Sizes: Yates’ studies rely on non-peer-reviewed commercial DNA tests from his own company (DNA Consultants), analyzing small, non-random samples.

One such study included 67 self-identified Cherokee descendants, some from Oklahoma or North Carolina reservations. Mainstream genetic research requires large, randomized populations and rigorous statistical analysis, which Yates’ work lacks. Critics note that his reference populations (for example, modern Sephardic Jews) may include post-colonial admixture, leading to false positives.

Misinterpretation of Haplogroups: Yates claims “high levels” of Middle Eastern markers (*e.g.*, haplogroups associated with Berbers or Jews), but these are often European or North African in origin, resulting from colonial intermixing (*e.g.*, Sephardic Jews in the 1600s–1700s settling in the Southeast). For instance, “full-blooded” Cherokees in his samples

¹ Research furnished by @Grok, Xai, September 2025. Courtesy of Scarlet Thread Publishing, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

showed high European DNA and only trace Native American (Asiatic) markers, which aligns with historical admixture rather than ancient Hebrew migration. Geneticists like Jennifer Raff emphasize that Cherokee identity is cultural and tribal, not DNA-based, and populations.

Fringe Nature and Debunking: These claims echo discredited 19th-century theories (*e.g.*, British Israelism) and are promoted in apologetic or conspiratorial contexts. Let's examine the claims of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon regarding a people group Smith called the Lamanites:

In the Book of Mormon, the Lamanites are depicted as one of the primary peoples who settled in the ancient Americas. Smith claimed they were descendants of Laman, the eldest son of Lehi, a prophet from Jerusalem who, according to the text, led his family and others from the Middle East to the Americas around 600 BC by divine command. Smith further claimed that they were cursed with a "skin of blackness" as a sign of their disobedience to God. (2 Nephi 5:21²)

The Lamanites are not recognized as an actual historical people group by anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, or geneticists. As to DNA, the scientific consensus—based on peer-reviewed studies—shows that Native American DNA, including Cherokee, derives primarily from Asian migrations via the Beringia land bridge (*ca.* 15,000–25,000 years ago), with haplogroups A, B, C, D, and X linked to Siberian/Central Asian populations. Mainstream sources, like the Smithsonian Institution and genetic databases (*e.g.*, GenBank), confirm Cherokee mtDNA haplogroups (A, B, C, D, X) are predominantly Asian-derived, with any "Hebrew-like" signals from post-1492 European/North African contact.

In summary, while Yates' claims have gained traction in niche online communities (for example, X posts from 2025 promoting "lost tribes" theories), they are not correct or scientifically validated. They rely on selective data and ignore broader genomic evidence.

How These Claims Fit with Evidence Against Joseph Smith's Migration Narrative

Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon (1830) claims that Israelite groups (*e.g.*, Lehiters from *ca.* 600 BC, Mulekites) migrated to the Americas and became the "principal ancestors" of Native Americans (original 1981 edition; revised to "among the ancestors" in 2006). Genetic evidence overwhelmingly contradicts this, showing Native American origins from Asian migrations via Beringia (*ca.* 15,000–25,000 years ago), with no pre-Columbian

² "And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them." (2 Nephi 5:21.)

Middle Eastern/Hebrew DNA. Yates' claims do not alter this consensus; instead, they fit as outliers that:

Reflect Post-Colonial Admixture, Not Ancient Migration: Any “Hebrew-like” markers in Cherokee samples (*e.g.*, European/North African haplogroups) trace to 17th–19th-century Sephardic Jewish or Moorish settlers in the Southeast, not pre-Columbian Israelites. Large-scale studies (*e.g.*, Reich et al., 2012) confirm >99% Asian-derived DNA in Native Americans, with no Semitic signals predating European contact.

Support the Limited Geography Model's Weaknesses: The LDS Church's response to DNA evidence—a “limited geography” in Mesoamerica where Lehwites intermingled with Asians—already struggles with the absence of Israelite DNA continent-wide. Yates' Cherokee-focused claims (in the Southeast) don't help, as Cherokee haplogroups (*e.g.*, X, A–D) are Asian/Eurasian, and any “Hebrew” signals are recent European admixture, not ancient migration. This reinforces the scientific consensus: No evidence supports Book of Mormon migrations, as Native American genomes show Siberian/Central Asian origins, not Near Eastern.

Fringe Claims as Confirmation Bias: These assertions often appear in apologetic contexts (*e.g.*, Book of Mormon Evidence sites) or conspiracy theories on X, linking Cherokee to “lost tribes” without rigorous controls. They do not fit the broader evidence because they ignore continental-wide studies. For example, there is no Semitic DNA in Mesoamerica, the proposed Book of Mormon setting. For this and other reasons, The claims made of Hebrew DNA making it into the Cherokee DNA before the late 1400's failed in peer review.

In essence, these claims are not credible and reinforce the scientific rejection of Joseph Smith's migration narrative: Native American DNA is Asian-derived, with no ancient Hebrew component, as confirmed by large-scale genomic projects.